

A full-page photograph of Thom Yorke performing on stage. He is wearing a dark jacket and holding a microphone to his mouth, singing. The background is dark with some stage lights visible. The text is overlaid on the image.

Thom Yorke: 'Like a hyperactive toddler.'

'We're more confident and relaxed. And we're playing better.' **ED O'BRIEN**

RADIOHEAD

Civica Arena, Milan

Tuesday, 17 June 2008



THOM YORKE AND CO: REINVENTING THE ROCK TOUR, TELLING JOKES.

The sky hangs low over central Milan this evening.

Rain drifts down and, round the perimeter of the Civica Arena, clouds obscure the tops of the trees. Up on the stage of this 200-year-old stadium, Thom Yorke is twitching and murmuring through *Weird Fishes/Arpeggi*, his voice as eerie as Jonny Greenwood's delicate guitar, floating out over the pitch. Bathed in sepia lights and moving with a ghostly shimmer, he looks like the irradiated Mr Burns from the *X-Files* episode of *The Simpsons*.

Then comes *The Gloaming*, performed in appositely moody late-evening light and oozing brooding ambience. Are Radiohead, that most diligent of bands, even controlling the weather these days? Having shaken the record industry by offering *In Rainbows* for free, anything's possible.

On their six-month international trek, the band are doing everything they can to reimagine the touring rock band's immediate environment: congruent with Yorke's role as spokesman for Friends Of The Earth's Big Ask campaign, Radiohead are touring with a weather eye on their carbon footprint. This means playing city centre venues with good public transport links and buying a separate PA that remains in America for when they play there (no onerous air-freight for this band who, in every sense, like to keep their feet on the ground). It also means investing in energy-storing batteries costing £200,000 and an innovative, eco-smart LED lighting rig.

"It uses between a fifth and a 10th of the power," guitarist Ed O'Brien will explain when we meet backstage after the gig. "The old lights are warm, and

these are a bit harsh, but they're more responsive – it's instant. So it's worth it."

The reality of being one of the biggest bands in the world has meant some compromises in the other direction, too. "We've never been a band to take executive jets to and from gigs. But we had to charter a plane to get us from Paris to Barcelona because of the Spanish truckers' strike – we had commitments and we had to get us and the crew down there."

The first American leg, O'Brien reports, was a joy. "It was warm summer nights, big parks, people stoned. We could change the set a bit – open up with *All I Need*, say – and it worked. Over there we're sort of in that Grateful Dead kinda zone now." By that he means "the crowds come with you, so you don't have to play *Paranoid Android* every night. We've played *No Surprises* only once on this tour. We haven't done *Creep*, although we haven't ruled it out. It's just when the moment's right..."

Radiohead's two-hour set before 18,000

Italians in this beautiful but crumbly stadium (the original home of Inter Milan,

before moving to the San Siro) does indeed forswear such traditional crowd-pleasers. But there are still glories aplenty. After the eerie atmosphere of *The Gloaming*, the menace hardens on *Myxomatosis*: fat, angry synth throbs are given voice and shape by Yorke growling the lyrics and throwing dance moves. *Optimistic* glows red-hot with spectral twangs from Jonny Greenwood. *My Iron Lung* is a rhapsody in blinding black and white, the lights shadowing the power chords.

"Andiamo!" – meaning, "Come on!" – shouts a charged-up Yorke at the end of the latter, one of his few on-mic pronouncements tonight. Spread out over the large stage, the band members concentrate on the jobs at hand: Jonny Greenwood coaxing alien bleeps from his guitar during *Exit Music (For A Film)*; O'Brien waving his arms to whip the crowd along during an energetic *Jigsaw Falling Into Place*; Yorke, seated at a drumkit, splashing away like a hyperactive toddler during a thrillingly chaotic *Bangers & Mash*.

Still, it is, overall, a less aggressive show than previous outings: fewer crunching guitars, fewer anthems. This new model Radiohead, loose and limber, wrap up the first of their two nights in Milan with a fist of songs that demonstrate their free-spirited adventurism. *Climbing Up The Walls* begins with a burst of static, conjured from one of the younger Greenwood's box of tricks. "Jonny's trying to find the football," quips Yorke – Italy are playing France tonight in Euro 2008 (the stadium erupts when O'Brien announces that they've won 2-0).

Then there's a blast of opera as green lights crackle across the huge screens flanking the stage, followed by

15 step
bodysnatchers
all i need
lucky
nude
pyramid song
arpeggi
the gloaming
myxomatosis
faust arp
videotape
optimistic
my iron lung
reckoner
everything in its right place
exit music
jigsaw
morning bell
there there
bangers 'n' mash
climbing up the walls
street spirit
cymbal rush / go slowly
you & whose army? / karma police
idioteque

Radiohead / Milan Show 17 June 2008



Radiohead: the pole-dancers failed to show

Remarkably, Thom Yorke escaped the falling scaffolding unscathed

RETNA



'It's a less aggressive show: fewer guitars, fewer anthems.'

the clatter of helicopter blades and a throbbing red glow flooding the entire pitch.

The multimedia whirl subsides as a magnificent Street Spirit (Fade Out) is followed by You And Whose Army?, Yorke leering into the camera mounted on his piano, as it has been since 2003, only now his face is multiplied and boggling at the crowd 17 times over from the screens. Then, it's all over bar the pogoing: the electro jitter of Idioteque sends Yorke spinning round the stage as fractals fill the screens.

"We're more confident and relaxed,"

O'Brien explains over a cup of tea during a post-gig post-mortem. "And we're playing better." We're sitting in a small catering area, recycling bins lined up against the wall, the band's regular security team (who also work for Oasis and Arctic Monkeys) policing the steady flow of well-wishers.

As the clock hits midnight it's more a civilised aftershow gathering than a party. Yorke is with his wife, drummer Phil Selway is phoning home, bass player Colin Greenwood chats with friends; only his brother, the band's youngest and shyest member, is nowhere to be seen.

Also absent: Brad Pitt, who was on the guest list. He's spending the summer in the South of France with a heavily pregnant Angelina Jolie. Presumably he couldn't get a babysitter, though he does turn up at the following

night's show. But tonight Hollywood is represented by Pitt's Fight Club buddy Edward Norton and Superbad's Jonah Hill.

"In Rainbows demands you to be relaxed," continues the guitarist by way of explaining the band's current approach to performing live. "You couldn't go up there with the Kid A, OK Computer, Bends kind of angst and edge. The new songs, such as Reckoner and Arpeggi and the like, require a groove. And that requires your body to be relaxed."

Summer 2008 and Radiohead are radiantly happy, albeit glowing from sustainable low-energy sources. They're doing their own thing: O'Brien says they declined a Reading Festival headline offer, and could have fitted a Glastonbury slot into their schedule but opted not to, for fear of becoming the festival's "house band" after appearing there three times already, most recently during 2003's Hail To The Thief tour. But the warmth of the songs on In Rainbows and their post-release, post-EMI bounce show no signs of abating. They've been exploring some song ideas during soundchecks and O'Brien reports that Yorke has been writing lyrics. And a crisp few weeks after the tour finishes this October, Radiohead are heading into the studio.

"We'll try and do it a bit differently. Rather than do a month-long session we'll do five-day sessions, like we used to do with the B-sides. We did Talk Show Host, Molasses and Bishop's Robes in Surrey Sound – the studio where The



Jonny Greenwood: the 'hoodie draw-string solo' had to be seen.

Police made Regatta De Blanc – in three days. It was brilliant. You just go in there with a head of steam and just do it. Then later on you find out what you think about it rather than judging it at the time."

So, whether for free or for sale, might we see a new Radiohead mini-album or EP sooner rather than later? "Yeah, absolutely, anything! If we've got a great four-track EP, that would be brilliant. No lead time, get it out. That's what's exciting. And we've got the means now to do it. Literally, we could finish it, master, bang, we've done it. That stuff's all up for grabs. We've set up the model now."

O'Brien rises. Pausing to throw his paper cup in the appropriate recycling bin, he strides over to chat with fan Ed Norton. Everything in its right place, indeed. ■ CRAIG MCLEAN